Los sentidos de la noche

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In 1994 I travelled to Cuba to spend time with Teatro de Los Elementos, a small theatre company dedicated to community and educational development projects. I met its director, José Oriol Gonzales, while negotiating his participation in the first Australian International Popular Theatre Exchange. I was involved in this project as interpreter, facilitator and performer. Consequently I spent nine months in Habana, Cumanayagua, Matanzas and the Escambray mountain house of renowned Theatre Company El Escambray, studying and living with the company. Cuba in 1994 was only beginning to open up to international tourism, balseros brought international media attention to the island, the gay community was still very much clandestine, and thanks to the infamous comment at the time—Tenemos las putas más educadas del continente Americano—prostitutes in Cuba were known as the most educated in the American continent. Diplomats and those with limited US dollars were able to buy in Diplotiendas. As a legacy of El Bloqueo—the US embargo—there were very limited resources to maintain the island’s capital city. Everywhere after sunset was dark and even when part of the city may appear stuck in time, there was no sense of stagnation. Rather this complex and fascinating Habana in 1994 resembled to me a beautiful mulata alive, experienced in many forms of love and histories. Cuba and its contradictions impacted on me deeply. I felt at home, secure with all my senses awakened. I used to walk from El Vedado to Habana Vieja, sometimes waiting for the sunrise by El Malecón, only to get to the nearest bread shop—panadería—for spare pieces of the morning’s first bread. Walking in the dark I got lost many times in parks, corners and once splendid avenues. Reflecting on my time in Cuba I wrote two poems titled ‘Habana del ‘94.’ The third poem—presented here first—I wrote in response to a recurrent question that many people ask when I participate in activists’ actions to raise awareness about the situation
of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The accompanying drawings and poster design, ‘Ellas,’ are by Abigail Lutzen. The image composition for ‘Not because I am Mexican’ is by Tjanara Jali Talbot.

A Postcard: La rosa de los vientos me cuenta que cuatro son los sentidos.
Al Norte: La ceguera es blanca y al desierto lo iluminan huesos en cruz.
Al Sur: Un Ginko Biloba pinta en amarillo los domingos de infancia.
Al Este: El sol danza en intricadas caricias.
Al Oeste: Un banco de hospicio absurdo y sucio espera.

Ciclón, Agosto: La Habana 1994

Los sentidos de la noche tienen rumbo y poemas salvadores.
Mi sentido Sur me lleva donde la tierra se viste roja y húmeda,
Bañada en olores y colores litoraleños bendita Yamanya
los catapulta del centro hacia la vida y con alas de mujer
vuela sobre agridulces sueños intercontinentales.
Hilando mantas de historias inconclusas que guardan
el secreto de tus manos y la memoria de la luna en tu vientre
mientras desesperados dedos en lágrimas dibujaban mapas
para buscarte en el vacío del insomnio.
Not because I am Mexican

Not because I walk
A trembling line
Between my portal door
And the maquila
But because
I am Woman—SOY MUJER
Not because the rage
Strangle sobs in my heart
And a cry transformed
In futile words
Scrape through
Clenching teeth
Breath of breaths
But because
I am Woman—SOY MUJER
'Ellas' by Abigail Lutzen © 2010

Not because I can talk
The talk dressed the dress
Wear the hats
Multiple diverse hats
Multiple diverse talks
But Because
I am Woman—SOY MUJER
A body. A name. A shape
Feet tracking pain
They also trace my name
While her breath names me.

Suspiro o Auyido

Loba o Diosa

Lenguaje ausente

Rescatado en una sílaba,
La que me califica y me nombra.

Habana del 94
1. I walked in dark, pitch black all senses awaken

Smells...sounds...shapes
Forming under the souls of my sandals.
Caminarte Ciudad, carefully, ever slowly slide
Shifted my feet on the pavement.
I knew the holes and cracks
The in-between spaces
Where memories from the night before
Have drawn maps from El Vedado
To La Habana Vieja,
Esta ciudad me camina desde adentro
She walks me enveloped in summer smells,
The lover, the dyke, the poofter
in Plaza Mayor
Behind Marti’s statue
Eros is a revolutionary affair,
Smile is pulling my dress to attention
Y una media luna con ojos de infancia
Me llama: A boly! A boly!
A lolly? I wondered? No a boligrafo—A pen
Vieja quebrada y bella
Habana walked my senses inside out
Cantando tus arrugas I shed a skin
To resurrect at dawn.
Bailaste de norte a sur mis sentidos
And love made me
Desde un balsero malecón de madrugada
Hasta saguanes de calladas Iglesias.

Habana del 94
2. Caminarte ciudad

Dolor-Olor que descompone
Pútridos aromas Habaneros
Matutinos Vespértinos
Lo diplocompuesto descompuesto
Sobre la agrietada cara
De esta vieja sabia y desacechada
Reina Puta Ciudad.
La canción del balsero canta:
‘Del Otro Lado’ ... ‘Del Otro Lado’
‘Allá’ ... Allá Ellos’.
Jadeantes húmedos portales
Y te camino y te huelo y te duelo.
Diplomacia, diplotienda
Diplomática mirada
Diplo visto y si te he visto ...
No me acuerdo.
¿Cruzo la noche O la noche me cruza?
La media luna noche me trastoca e ilumina
mi regreso al Vedado
Sobre el milagroso claro-oscuro
De tus rumbos.

Drawing by Abigail Lutzen © 2010

Los sentidos de la noche—Liliana E. Correa, June 2011